

PARTNER WITH THE RECOVERY COMMUNITY

Every day, people with mental and/or substance use disorders begin to reclaim their lives and rebuild their futures through the journey of recovery. Millions of individuals are already in recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders or have learned to manage the effects of these problems. Members of the recovery community and their family members are important role models for people in recovery, helping to promote the effectiveness of intervention, support, and treatment, as well as spreading the hope of recovery.

The 23rd annual **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** observance this September will celebrate the effectiveness of treatment services and the reality of recovery. **Recovery Month** is sponsored by the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**, within the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**.

This year's theme, **"Join the Voices for Recovery: It's Worth It,"** emphasizes that while the road to recovery is sometimes difficult, benefits of preventing and overcoming mental and/or substance use disorders are significant and valuable to individuals, families, and communities. People in recovery achieve healthy lifestyles, both physically and emotionally, and contribute in positive ways to their communities. They also prove to family members, friends, and others that prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover.

Recovery Month supports SAMHSA's **Strategic Initiatives**, which guide SAMHSA's work to help people with mental and/or substance use disorders and their communities and families. SAMHSA works to prevent behavioral health conditions and promote overall health and well-being for all Americans. SAMHSA's **Recovery Support** Strategic Initiative partners with people recovering from mental and/or substance use disorders and their family members to promote individual, program, and system approaches to building recovery and resilience.

This document details how members of the recovery community can share the benefits of recovery and act as leaders and role models. People in recovery are experienced in recognizing the signs of mental and/or substance use disorders, which are listed on the pages that follow, and can support their peers in identifying and implementing appropriate action steps to meet individual needs. In addition to providing a reminder of the signs of behavioral health conditions and possible action steps, the next section promotes self-care among people in the recovery community to address the potential for relapse. The **"Join the Voices for Recovery"** document in this toolkit shares positive journeys from the perspectives of multiple individuals in recovery.

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I have been in recovery since February 10, 2008, and it has completely changed my life for the better. I come from a family with a history of alcoholism, and I drank – and blacked out – for the first time when I was 9 years old. I started drinking again as an 18-year old college freshman. I could never control my drinking. Once I started, I never knew when I would stop, or what I might do.

After law school, it took only 2 years for my alcoholism and depression to turn a promising young trial lawyer, good friend, and devoted husband into an isolated and suicidal 29-year old with little hope. But God sent me a therapist who happened to specialize in trauma and addiction, and she told me where to find help. After a failed suicide attempt, I went to treatment and started to receive care for my illness.

With the help of other people in recovery, I have learned to practice a new way of living without alcohol. I found an Oxford House that supported my recovery while I worked toward regaining my independence. My life is not perfect, but recovery has given me a second chance to face challenges with a measure of grace and gratitude.

I have the capacity to help others, and to ask for (and accept) help when I need it. I have been able to pursue my dream of working in public policy, and I now use my education and experiences in my work as a recovery advocate. I share my recovery with others, and encourage them to speak out about issues that matter to our community. Recovery has given my life new meaning and purpose.

Signs of Behavioral Health Conditions

People in the recovery community have experienced mental and/or substance use disorders themselves, and therefore are likely familiar with the challenges a person in recovery may face. This understanding enables the recovery community to identify warning signs in someone in need, share their own stories to promote recovery, and help themselves and others recognize signs of possible relapse and seek appropriate support. It is important to note that while mental and substance use disorders can co-occur, meaning someone may have both at the same time, people may not always know the warning signs associated with all of these conditions. Below are tips to help identify them.

Symptoms of mental health problems among children, adolescents, and adults include:¹

- Feelings of extreme highs and lows;
- Excessive fears, worries, and anxieties;
- Social withdrawal;
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits;
- Strong feelings of anger;

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- Substance misuse;
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities;
- Excessive complaints of physical ailments;
- Changes in school performance; and
- Hyperactivity.

Symptoms of substance misuse among children, adolescents, and adults include:²

- **Mood swings:** Virtually all mood-altering drugs produce mood swings ranging from euphoria to depression;
- **School and work problems:** Changes in school and work performance can occur, such as excessive tardiness, absences, missed deadlines, failure to turn in assignments, suspension, or expulsion; and
- **Changes in appearance:** People with substance use disorders may have worsening personal appearance or hygiene or a sudden gain or loss of weight.

Although all of these signs may suggest behavioral health conditions, these generalized symptoms and signs may also be indicative of other problems or disorders. While it is important to be aware of these signs and their relationship with behavioral health conditions, it is critical not to automatically discount physical conditions as a possible cause.

Signs of Relapse

Stable recovery requires self-awareness and self-care. Relapse of substance use and re-emergence of mental disorder symptoms is normal and may occur during the process of recovery. The potential for these problems makes recognition of personal warning signs and access to a personal recovery support network important.

Although the warning signs of re-emergence of a mental and/or substance use disorder may be subtle and specific to an individual, there are some general practices that may be beneficial in managing the recovery process. These practices can also be enhanced with the help of a support network:³

- Develop self-assessment tools to address recovery, relapse prevention, and wellness needs;
- Identify personal relapse prevention needs, triggers, and warning signs;
- Reinforce lifestyle changes, including stress management, relaxation techniques, spiritual practices, and conflict resolution;
- Understand factors that threaten recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders, including violence, abuse, neglect, and other environmental, interpersonal dynamics; and
- Utilize community resources, including peer supports to maintain recovery and wellness.

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Understand Recovery

There are perhaps no stronger advocates for the power of recovery than people who are already sustaining their own recovery. Social supports improve recovery outcomes,⁴ and many people struggling with mental and/or substance use disorders need someone who has experience coping with these issues to trust and relate to when embarking on their own recovery journey.

It is important for the recovery community to share what that journey entails. With specific knowledge and personal expectations, people pursuing recovery can advance on a path that is best suited for their overall health and well-being. Examples of recovery inspire people to look beyond mere survival and existence and to map out their own unique pathway.⁵

For people in recovery from behavioral health conditions, sharing experiences and describing the value of recovery instills hope. While recovery is a unique journey, for many the recovery process:⁶

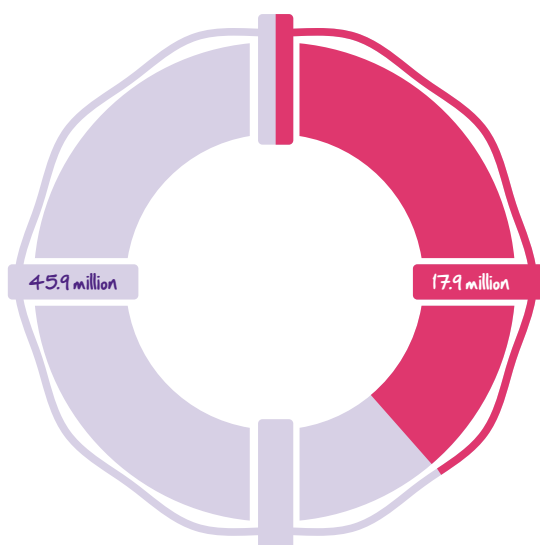
- Emerges from hope;
- Is person-driven;
- Occurs via many pathways;
- Is holistic;
- Is supported by peers and allies;
- Is supported by relationships and social networks;
- Is culturally based and influenced;
- Is supported by addressing trauma;
- Involves individual, family, and community strengths and responsibilities; and
- Is based on respect.

Recovery encompasses various aspects of an individual's life, including mind, body, spirit, and community life. It involves factors such as housing, employment, education, mental health and health care services, addiction treatment, peer recovery support services, spirituality, creativity, social networks, community participation, and family supports.⁷

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Opportunities to Achieve and Sustain Recovery

As people establish expectations and proceed on the road to recovery, they also learn about the different treatment methods that best fit their personal needs. Access to individualized treatment and support services is critical. For example, in 2010, 23.1 million people aged 12 or older needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem (9.1 percent of people aged 12 or older). Of these, 2.6 million (1.0 percent of people aged 12 or older and 11.2 percent of those who needed treatment) received treatment at a specialty facility.^{8, 9}



In 2010, among **45.9 million** Americans aged 18 or older who experienced any mental illness, **17.9 million** received mental health treatment.*

The recovery community plays an instrumental role in other people's recovery journeys and has a unique opportunity to educate individuals with a mental health and/or substance use disorder about the different treatment approaches available, the effectiveness of treatment, available recovery support services, and how to sustain long-term recovery. In addition to the tips in this section, the "**Treatment and Recovery**" document of this toolkit also details treatment methods for behavioral health conditions.

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Share Stories: The Recovery Community Can Help

Real-life stories bring to life the power of recovery. Stories engage people, connect with their emotions, and share passions, sadness, hardships, and joys.¹⁰ For the recovery community, the use of words – through stories or conversations – may help a person realize that he or she has a problem and needs to seek treatment. Peer-to-peer interventions may inspire people to seek assistance prior to needing formalized treatment.

Often, stories resonate when they relate to a person's own experiences or conditions. By listening to or watching a testimonial, individuals learn what to anticipate during their recovery journey. For people in recovery, there are a number of ways to motivate others and help them discover the opportunities that exist to combat behavioral health conditions. The following are options to get involved in the recovery community.

Speak publicly and/or plan an event

People in recovery are proof that recovery is possible, and it is worth it. In 2011, there were more than 1,200 **Recovery Month** events nationwide, and many featured real-life examples of community members who overcame a behavioral health condition. In addition, organizations exist to mobilize advocates to speak on behalf of those with behavioral health conditions. To build confidence during a speech or presentation, become familiar with the material and relevant facts about mental and/or substance use disorders. It helps to practice, be aware of the audience and environment, and embrace the experience.¹¹

People in recovery can share their story through many channels:¹²

- Neighbors;
- Friends;
- Civic organizations;
- Media;
- Faith-based organizations;
- City councils;
- State legislators; and
- Behavioral health treatment providers.

Events such as a run/walk bring attention to those in recovery, help educate communities about behavioral health conditions, and demonstrate the reality of recovery, as well as raise money to support local resources. See the "**Promote Recovery Month with Events**" document in this toolkit for more information on how to plan an event this September!

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Form or participate in a support group

Support groups are a place for people to give and receive both emotional and practical support, and exchange information.¹³ They allow people to reinforce their own recovery, while conversing with others and sharing experiences.

Participants in support groups may:¹⁴

- Feel less lonely, isolated, or judged;
- Gain a sense of empowerment and control;
- Improve their coping skills and adjustment;
- Have an opportunity to talk openly and honestly about feelings; and
- Reduce distress, depression, or anxiety.

Support groups are a great place to find practical tips and resources, such as details about medical treatments, research, and treatment strategies. They can also provide information about public policy, legal resources, privacy laws, and protection from discrimination.¹⁵

To find a support group:¹⁶

- Ask a doctor or other health care provider for assistance. A doctor, nurse, social worker, chaplain, or psychologist may be able to recommend a support group.
- Contact local community centers, libraries, churches, mosques, synagogues, or temples.
- Ask others with the same illness or life situation for suggestions.
- Contact a State or national organization devoted to a mental and/or substance use disorder.
- Search the Internet. Online support groups are available as email lists, newsgroups, chat rooms, blogs, and social networking sites, such as Facebook. If you need help on how to use these online tools, visit the “**New Media Glossary**” and “**Develop Your Social Network**” documents in this toolkit.

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Offer assistance and encouragement

People in recovery don't need a large forum to spread their message that treatment is effective and recovery is possible. The recovery community makes an impact through everyday dialogue, encouragement, and taking time to support others on their recovery journey. Because mental and/or substance use disorders affect a person's ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle, handle stress, relate to others, and make choices, below are some positive coping strategies to manage these issues.^{17, 18}

- Eat nutritious meals and snacks;
- Get physical activity and enough rest;
- Reduce caffeine intake and stop smoking;
- Seek help from counselors or support groups on a regular basis;
- Get support from family and friends; and
- Find time to take care of yourself and relax.

In addition, the tools below may help people in need feel stronger and more hopeful.¹⁹

- **Connect with and help others.** People who feel connected with others are happier and healthier – and may even live longer. Additionally, people who consistently help others experience less depression, greater calm, and fewer pains.
- **Stay positive.** Those who regularly focus on the positive aspects of their lives are less upset by painful memories. Positive emotions boost one's ability to bounce back from stress.
- **Take care of your spirit.** People who have strong spiritual lives may be healthier and live longer. Spirituality seems to reduce the stress that can contribute to diseases.
- **Seek assistance if needed.** Those who tackle problems or get support in a tough situation tend to feel less depressed.

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Additional Recovery Resources

A variety of resources provide additional information on **Recovery Month**, mental and/or substance use disorders, and prevention, treatment, and recovery support services. Use the toll-free numbers and websites below to share your experiences, learn from others, and seek help from professionals. Through these resources, individuals can interact with others and find support on an as-needed, confidential basis.

- **SAMHSA's Website** – Leads efforts to reduce the impact of mental and/or substance use disorders on communities nationwide.
- **SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) – or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)** – Provides 24-hour, free and confidential treatment referral and information about mental and/or substance use disorders, prevention, and recovery in English and Spanish.
- **SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" Website** – Contains information about treatment options and special services located in your area.
- **SAMHSA's "Considerations for the Provision of E-Therapy" Report** – Shares extensive information on the benefits, issues, and success of e-therapy.
- **SAMHSA's ADS Center** – Provides information and assistance to develop successful efforts to reduce prejudice and discrimination and promote social inclusion.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255)** – Provides a free, 24-hour helpline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.
- **Ensuring Solutions to Alcohol Problems** – Provides information and tools to increase access to effective and affordable screening and treatment for individuals, families, and businesses.
- **Faces & Voices of Recovery** – Organizes and mobilizes Americans in recovery, their family, and their friends to promote the right and resources to recover. It accomplishes this through advocacy, education, and demonstrations of the power and proof of long-term recovery.
- **National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD)** – Fights alcoholism and drug addiction and offers assistance to individuals, parents, youth, and friends and family.
- **Recovery Connection** – Provides people and their loved ones in need of addiction help with detox or treatment information. It provides a free national helpline with staff who have had addiction problems and understand the recovery process.

Inclusion of websites and resources in this document and on the *Recovery Month* website does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

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